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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 TOKYO 001436

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR VISITS ABDUCTION SITE OF MEGUMI YOKOTA

REF: TOKYO 02971

11. SUMMARY: Ambassador Schieffer visited Niigata City on March 16 and retraced the route 13 year old Megumi Yokota took the night she was abducted by agents of the DPRK in 1977 on her way home from school. He was accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Yokota and over 50 reporters. The Ambassador then met with 12 members of the two leading abductee family members support groups, as well as representatives of the local Niigata Prefectural Assembly. During the meeting, and in a press conference that followed, the Ambassador:

-- pledged that so long as he is Ambassador, he will make every effort to resolve this issue and to see that justice is done;

-- assured the families that Japanese officials are working hard to resolve the issue, and raise it every time they meet with the Ambassador to discuss North Korea.

-- promised continued cooperation with Japan to resolve this issue, but pointed out that the decision to apply sanctions against the DPRK is a matter for the Japanese government to decide; and

-- said he has discussed this with the President and, moved by the first-hand account he had received, would do so again.

The families and their supporters expressed their appreciation for the U.S. Government's strong support for their cause, and for the Ambassador's willingness to personally come to Niigata City. The day's events generated extremely positive press coverage in all major Japanese media outlets for the support shown by the United States. END SUMMARY.

12. On March 16, 2006, Ambassador Schieffer visited Niigata City and walked with Mr. and Mrs. Yokota, retracing the steps their 13 year old daughter Megumi had taken the night she was abducted by North Korean agents on her way home from junior high school in November 1977. The visit fulfilled an offer the Ambassador had made during his initial meeting with the abductee families in May 2005 (reftel). During that meeting, he had offered to meet with more family members and travel to

an abduction site to see for himself what had happened.

#### The Saddest Story I Have Ever Heard

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¶3. As the Yokota's walked with the Ambassador, they explained that two classmates had accompanied Megumi part of the way home. First one, and then the other wished Megumi good night as they neared their respective homes located just blocks from the school. Based on the response of police dogs who later tracked the scent from a representative piece of clothing, police concluded that Megumi was snatched by kidnappers as she was walking alone, just a couple of blocks from her home. National Police Agency investigators believe Megumi was likely grabbed from behind and bundled into a car that took her to the nearby seacoast, Mrs. Yokota explained; one of their neighbors later reported hearing a girl scream at the time Megumi would have normally reached that corner on her walk home.

¶4. After viewing the location of the Yokota's former home two blocks down that side street, the Ambassador and Mr. and Mrs. Yokota were driven through a windbreak of pine trees to Yorii Beach. From there, they looked out over the Sea of Japan in the direction of North Korea while the Yokotas explained the evidence gathered from other sources -- including a DPRK defector who claims knowledge of Megumi's abduction -- which indicates she was likely bundled into a small boat at some point along the beach and taken out to a pre-arranged rendezvous with a larger DPRK vessel. The long walk gave the Ambassador the opportunity to express to the Yokota's his personal sadness and deep sympathy over the abduction of their daughter. While viewing the abduction

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site, and again at the later press conference, the Ambassador said, "I think this is the saddest story I have ever heard."

¶5. A crowd of about 50 reporters -- representing every major Japanese national TV network, newspaper and wire service -- followed the Ambassador and the Yokota's as they walked from Yorii Junior High School to Yorii Beach. At the noontime press conference that followed, the Ambassador noted that some of the reporters were crying as the Yokotas spoke. Throughout the day, network news programs replayed scenes of the Yokotas speaking with the Ambassador as they walked along, and featured a number of moving quotes from the press conference. National network NTV, in an unusual move, devoted a full 20-minute segment of their afternoon program "The Wide" to the Ambassador's visit and the Yokota story.

#### Request to Meet With the President

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¶6. After their stop at Yorii Beach, the Ambassador and Mr. and Mrs. Yokota held a meeting at the Niigata Hotel with officials from the two primary abductee support groups -- The Association of the Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea (AFVKN) and the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea (NARKN). The former principal of Megumi's school and one of the classmates who had walked home with her the night she was abducted were also present. At that meeting, Mr. Yokota expressed heartfelt appreciation to the Ambassador for coming to Niigata. Teruaki Masumoto, Secretary General of AFVKN whose sister is an abductee, said they believe over 100 Japanese citizens were abducted by DPRK agents. To date, five have been returned. Masumoto stressed that many of the family members are growing old, making resolution of the abduction issue an urgent priority. "Your coming here will put a lot of pressure on North Korea," Masumoto told the Ambassador, adding that he considers the actions of the U.S. Embassy to be "a great contribution to solving this issue."

¶7. Speaking on behalf of the Yokotas, Masumoto suggested that if the President were to meet with Mrs. Yokota when she

travels to Washington to testify before Congress in late April, it would put additional pressure on North Korea by making it clear that U.S. concerns about the DPRK will not be fully resolved until Pyongyang addresses the abduction issue.

Several participants expressed displeasure with the lack of progress by their own government, commenting that Japan appears "hesitant to call North Korea a rogue nation," and "should do more to protect the rights of its citizens." The issue will be difficult to resolve without more pressure, Tadashi Takahashi, Chair of the Niigata Prefecture Parliamentarian League for the Abduction Issue, remarked. Japan used to view the North Korean ferry (which regularly calls at Niigata Port) as a ship of peace; now Japan sees it as a "ship of devils," Takahashi added. Yoshie Baba, Chair of NARKN's Niigata Chapter, noted that the Ambassador's visit was the first time a U.S. official had come to Niigata to address this issue.

#### A Testament to the Love You Hold

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¶18. In his comments to the families and their supporters, the Ambassador said that his visit had given him a deeper perspective on the problem. He expressed his sadness over the "unbelievable burden" the family members have had to bear for so many years. "What comes home to me as I have listened to you is the incredible anguish that has come to your life. How could anyone sit at a table in North Korea and justify their policy of abductions? It is as if conscience and kindness that are a part of being human deserted those who made that decision," the Ambassador said.

¶19. Responding to the families' request to meet with the President, the Ambassador assured them he had spoken to President Bush about this issue and -- moved by what he had seen and heard that day -- intended to do so again. He pledged that so long as he is U.S. Ambassador to Japan, he

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would make every effort to resolve the issue and to see that justice is done. He pledged to continue to work with the Japanese government until this issue is resolved, adding that the imposition of unilateral economic sanctions against the DPRK is a matter for the Japanese government to decide. In both the private meeting and press conference that followed, the Ambassador stressed that the Japanese government was listening to the families. "Every time I have met with Japanese officials to discuss North Korea, they have raised the abduction issue," he said. "Japanese officials want to resolve this issue and always refer to it in terms of the overall goals we share for the Six-Party Talks," he assured.

¶10. At the conclusion of the Ambassador's meeting with AFVKN/NARKN, Mr. and Mrs. Yokota presented him with a photo album containing pictures of their daughter as a child, and later as an adult woman living in North Korea. Despite the DPRK's claim that Megumi Yokota committed suicide in the early 1990s, Mr. and Mrs. Yokota and many of their supporters believe the woman in those photographs is Megumi Yokota. They are convinced she is still alive and living somewhere in North Korea. The Ambassador thanked the Yokota's and their supporters for their continuous and tireless efforts on behalf of the abducted family members. He noted how difficult it must be to relive these tragic events nearly every day. "Your efforts are a testament to the love you hold for them," the Ambassador said.

SCHIEFFER